ALEXANDRIA BLACK HISTORY MUSEUM

Siyle and Idenfify:
Black Alexandria
in the 1970s, Portraits
by HOPACC Day











A Message

from the Director

t is with a great deal of pleasure that the Alexandria Black History Museum staff presents the exhibition Style and Identity: Black Alexandria in the 1970s, Portraits by Horace Day. This exhibition could not occur without the significant contributions of others. A word of thanks is extended to Dr. Adrienne Childs for her insightful exhibition essay, which places this body of work in its artistic context. Tal and Barbara Day and Charles R. Miller have generously loaned the paintings for the exhibition. I would also like to express sincere appreciation to Audrey Davis for her dedication in attending to critical details of the exhibition. Without her work on the exhibition, the quality of the final product and its significance for the community would have been diminished.

The Black History Museum is

Payne Street, Alexandria Virginia,Oil on Canvas: 24" x 28"
Collection of H. Talmage and Barbara Day

fortunate to be the first venue to display this collective body of work.

Horace Day painted his subjects with a great deal of respect. In the recent past, art objects depicting blacks were not always created to promote positive images. Instead, they were used to further perpetuate ongoing oppression and prejudice against people of African descent.

For decades, dehumanizing caricatures of African Americans (although offensive to blacks) were an acceptable part of American cultural history. Negative images of blacks were used in the early 19th century to defend the ideas of slavery as well as reinforce the belief that people of African descent were inferior. Horace Day, on the other hand, admired his subjects and painted them respectfully with an appreciation for how they presented themselves. Day appreciated the dignity and beauty of his subjects at a time when African Americans were not considered by the majority as suitable subject matter for art nor as appropriate subject matter for inclusion in history books.

The exhibition Style and Identity: Black Alexandria in the 1970s, Portraits by Horace Day marks the first time that this collection of portraits and landscapes has been exhibited in the same venue. It is hoped that the works in the exhibition will provide the viewer with a visual treat but also an appreciation for the opportunity to travel back in time and view Alexandria through the eyes of Horace Day. It is also the staff's desire that this exhibition would serve as a catalyst to forge new relationships between the museum staff and relatives of the individuals captured on canvas. From those efforts, the history of Alexandria's African American community will continue to expand.

Today, there is not one publication that tells the entire story of Alexandria's African American community from its earliest days through contemporary times. Although modest in content, this catalog serves as one small step forward toward an ultimate goal of producing a series of publications which tell a concise history of Alexandria's African American community. This catalog marks a new chapter in the museum's life as the staff redirects the work of the museum toward achieving this desired goal.

Louis Charles Hicks, Jr.

Director Alexandria Black History Museum

Front cover images (clockwise): Tony Womley; Quinter Allen; J.C. in Blue Cap; Jet Set and King Street Discount II.

Style and Identity:

Black Alexandria in the 1970s, Portraits by Horace Day

A Dedication to Allen 'Big Al" Carter

he Alexandria Black History Museum is pleased to present Style and Identity: Black Alexandria in the 1970s, Portraits by Horace Day. Day, a respected painter of American regional scenes, was also fascinated by the faces of the people he would meet. His portraits of African Americans, while not as well known as his landscapes and street scenes, are equally compelling.

This exhibition would not have come to fruition without the advice of the late artist Allen "Big Al" Carter. "Big Al" considered Horace Day a mentor and someone who influenced his painting technique. During a conversation with "Big Al," he suggested I call Horace Day's son Tal and discuss the possibility of a future exhibition at the museum.

Unfortunately, I do not know if "Big Al" knew this exhibition was being organized. In 2008, we both became seriously ill. After I was released from the hospital, I learned "Big Al" had died.

"Big Al," as he was known to his many friends, was one of Northern Virginia's most important African American artists. His death in late 2008 has left a great void for his family, friends, students, and the metropolitan area art scene. A master of many media – painting, watercolor, sculpture, animation and photography, "Big Al" was an artistic force to be reckoned with.

Allen Carter met Horace Day in Alexandria when he passed by Day's studio and was fascinated by his work. Carter introduced himself to Day, and began a professional relationship that lasted until



Reflections,Oil on Canvas: 24" x 18"
Collection of H. Talmage and Barbara Day

Day's death. In 1978, The Athenaeum mounted a joint exhibition of Day's and Carter's work called *Colors of the Mind*. At the time of Horace Day's death in 1984, a photograph of Allen Carter in his studio and a drawing by Carter had prominent places in Horace Day's home and studio.

Connections and friendships take many paths. Allen Carter and Horace Day had a great friendship. Through my friendship with "Big Al," I came to know the work of Horace Day and met his family.

One interesting fact of Horace Day's portraits of African Americans is the slice of time they capture. These portraits were painted at a time when Black was just becoming "beautiful," but when media still promoted stereotypical images of African Americans. The majority of the portraits in the exhibition are from Alexandria, Virginia, which was undergoing its own social upheaval in the 1970s. The emergence of urban renewal was changing the face of Alexandria, and traditional African American neighborhoods were disappearing. It was a time of flux, a time when African Americans were searching for their identity, their civil rights, and their place in society.

I want to extend my thanks to Tal and Barbara Day who have so graciously loaned Horace Day's portraits and other material from their collection for this exhibition. Many thanks are also extended to Charles R. Miller for the loan of Horace Day's *King Street Discount II* to the exhibition. Finally, I want to express deep appreciation to art historian Dr. Adrienne L. Childs for her catalog essay.

It is our expectation that some of the unnamed portraits may be identified by patrons, while others learn about Alexandria in the 1970s. This catalog may become a touchstone for future historians, both amateur and professional, who want to remember Alexandria, Virginia during a critical period in the City's development.

The staff of the Alexandria Black History Museum hopes you will enjoy *Style and Identity: Black Alexandria in the* 1970s, *Portraits by Horace Day*, and return for future exhibitions.

Audrey P. Davis

Assistant Director / Curator Alexandria Black History Museum

Horace Day (1909 - 1984) Biographical Note By II. Talmage Day

Horace Day was born in China of American missionary parents during their service with the American Reform Mission in Amoy (now Xiamen), China. As a child, Day first began to paint. By the age of twelve, he was painting quite accomplished landscapes of South China scenes in both oil and watercolor; and one of his most cherished books on art was a book on the drawings of Claude Lorrain that he had purchased as a teenager, before he began his studies at the League. These early inspirations are reflected in the work done by Day throughout his career, perhaps even more vividly as Day with maturity gained ever greater confidence in his personal vision.

Following Day's graduation from the Shanghai American School in 1927, he came to the United States to study at the Art Students League in New York City. While there, he studied with, among others, Kimon Nicolaides, Boardman Robinson, and Kenneth Hayes Miller, later serving as an assistant to Nicolaides. His promise as a painter was immediately recognized. He was awarded summer fellowships by the Tiffany Foundation while studying at the League and exhibited in every Tiffany Annual Exhibition during the years 1930-1933.

The first inclusion of Day's work in a national exhibition dates from 1931, when his work was included in an international exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago. His first one-man show in a New York gallery was an exhibition of his portraits of children from Manhattan's Lower East Side. From 1933 until his military service in World War II, Day was represented by the Macbeth Gallery -- one of the major commercial venues of the time. The work gaining recognition included portraits, floral still lifes, urban scenes and rural

landscapes of subjects in New York, Vermont, Georgia and the Carolina Low Country. He continued to explore each of these subjects through the balance of his life. Examples of such work are in many public and private collections, including the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Gibbes Museum, the Morris Museum of Art, the New Britain Museum of American Art, the Addison Gallery of American Art, and the Nelson-Atkins Gallery.

Following completion of his studies at the League, Day was named artist-in-residence at the Henry Street Settlement in New York. Then under the direction of Lillian Wald, the Henry Street Settlement was one of the pivotal centers of creative energy in New York. In 1936, Day was named the first director of the Herbert Institute of Art in Augusta, Georgia. Following his marriage in 1941 to another artist, Elizabeth Nottingham, Day and his wife joined the faculty at Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia. Except for time on leave for military service, during which Day continued to paint, and a one-year visiting appointment at the Kansas City Art Institute in 1946-1947, Day thereafter was a Professor of Art at Mary Baldwin until his retirement and relocation to Alexandria in 1967.

Following Day's retirement, he continued to paint actively and with growing confidence until the end of his life in 1984. Although Day traveled widely from the time of his appointment as Director of the Herbert Institute -- painting in Italy, Vermont, Maine, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, Wyoming, California, Idaho, Alaska, Florida and the Caribbean, the most substantial body of Day's work concerns the landscape and people of the Carolina Low Country and Virginia.

Reflections on the Work of Horace DayBy II. Talmage Day

Many years ago, I discovered among my Day grandparents' possessions a trunk of family photographs from their years as missionaries in China. The Day family looked remarkably Chinese in the professionally taken portraits in the trunk, not at all like their appearances in snapshots from that same period. When I mentioned these Chinese features to my father, he replied without any particular emotion that the portraits had been retouched by their Chinese photographers to make their subjects more handsome – more Chinese. Even the time when those efforts might have stirred his wry sense of humor had run.

As I now reflect, I wonder if that early exposure to racial stereotypes of good looks is yet another feature

of Horace Day's upbringing in China that shaped his development as an artist. And as I look at the resulting body of work, I sense that it is in his paintings of Black Americans over the years one can trace most readily the growing confidence with color generally that marks Horace Day's most mature work. In Day's portraits of Black Alexandrians, his subtle uses of brilliant, saturated colors as complements to the rich tones he appreciated in Black skin contrast markedly with almost all his work in the years most nearly following completion of his studies at the Art Students League.

In the paintings from that period, and even later, Day used bright color sparingly, to guide the eye. Yet, even in Day's very earliest exhibited work, his portraits of

young Jewish boys from Manhattan's Lower East Side, which were done at a time when looking "Jewish" was an issue in the broader culture, Horace Day's portraits demonstrated a disregard for stereotypes of good looks, a respect for and interest in differences, and an interest as well in what made his subjects interesting and psychologically coherent. But even as those portraits attracted favorable attention from critics for their perception and good humor, they respected in their subdued, brown tones the taste of their time.

It is ultimately in Horace Day's portraits of his Black subjects in Alexandria, I believe, that Day's excitement about color, his freedom from preconceptions of beauty, and his interest in people from different walks of life all came together. His Black subjects were, for the most part, persons whom he met on the street while painting in a neighborhood. All too frequently, when he asked some African American to pose for him, the response was, "You don't want to paint me. I'm too dark." With his freedom from preconceptions, he could see his subjects' beauty when they could not.

For Horace Day, the dark tones in a person's skin and the cast of a face were simply features, among others, that made a person beautiful and interesting to paint. Horace Day also admired the resilience of his Black subjects in dealing with hardship and their courage and moral strength in dealing with prejudice and other injustice. He was no more trapped by condescension than by stereotypes of good looks.

In the end, for all the mastery and growth in confidence and technique that this body of work may demonstrate, Horace Day's portraits of his Black subjects may ultimately succeed because he respected and enjoyed being with the people he chose to paint. At a time when many African Americans harbored insecurities about their skin color, Day's portraits helped liberate his subjects from harsh racial stereotypes about what was "attractive." In return, his Black subjects helped the artist find his own path to fulfillment.

Tal Day is the son of Horace Day. While not an artist, Tal recalls many conversations with his father about art over the years. Those conversations often provided insight into the elder Day's views on the artistic process, the problems he was addressing in particular paintings, and what made for a successful painting.

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2003, Horace Day: An Artist in Alexandria, 1967 – 1984, Alexandria Lyceum, Alexandria, Virginia.

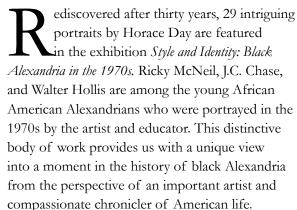
Horace Day's Notes on Painting African Americans:

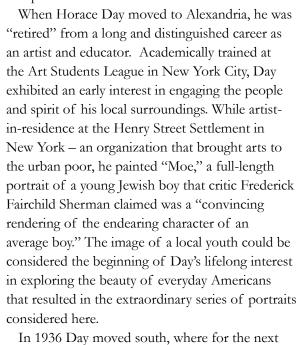
Horace Day's *Notes on Painting African Americans*. This short statement was quoted in the catalog essay. For a copy of Day's statement, written requests may be submitted to the estate of Horace Day. The address: H. Talmage Day, 113 North Fairfax Street, Ramsay Alley Entrance, Alexandria, VA 22314-3268.

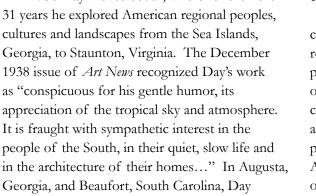
Tradition and Style Horace Day's Rediscovered Portraits of Black Alexandrians

"...the beauty of the Black man struck me with the same force that it struck the painters of the Renaissance..."

-Horace Day, 1972







became engaged with African American subjects as an integral part of the culture of the American south. He painted portraits, landscapes, still life imagery and impressionistic cityscapes. Day captured the charm and old-world ambiance of southern architecture as well as the character of local inhabitants. Day's work is emblematic of the spirit of regionalism that emerged in American art in the 1930s. This highly influential genre celebrated the flavors of the nation's various regions and sought to highlight and explore a uniquely American cultural identity. Rural culture, often considered to be more authentically American, became a major subject as artists attempted to ennoble everyday life.

Day was clearly attracted to black life in the South, as many of his works feature African Americans. We find that his particular interest in blacks as a subject of portraiture took hold during his years in Staunton, Virginia, while he and his wife, artist Elizabeth Nottingham Day, were on the faculty at Mary Baldwin College. While at Mary Baldwin, Day arranged for children from the Effie Anne Johnson Nursery School to pose as models for his studio classes. Portraits such as Tony Curtis; Young Woman - Staunton, Virginia; and Boy in Striped Tee Shirt are elegant renderings of local young people. His sensitive treatment of Tony Curtis and the anonymous sitter in Boy in Striped Tee Shirt demonstrate Day's interest in a kind of psychological rendering - their wideeyed, impassive faces are at once innocent and intelligent. The Staunton portraits of African American children, women and men can be considered precursors to the Alexandria series.

Horace Day demonstrated a high level of consciousness of the history and politics of representing blacks, as well as the social and psychological impact that the prevailing standards of beauty in America had on some people of color. In his 1972 statement "Notes on Blacks as Subjects in Paintings," Day lamented the prevalence of stereotypes in representing blacks in America. "Blacks then were fit subjects for painters only when they were young pickaninnies, cute



Ricky McNeil



Tony Curtis

like their mamas carrying flowers, or old as their grannies doing the laundry, or Uncle Toms sitting in the sun or picking cotton." In this statement he goes on to remark that "...as long as Whites were conditioned not to see Blacks as attractive, it [made] separation of the races much easier. Blacks, too, however, were constantly by every means persuaded that they were inferior." In many ways, Day's Staunton and Alexandria portraits of African American subjects respond to the demeaning tropes of blackness that characterized the images of blacks in American art and popular visual culture through the early twentieth century in America.

Horace Day and Black Alexandria

From an 18th -century slaveholding territory to the racialized political climate of the 1970s, Alexandria, Virginia, had a long and complex history of race relations when Horace Day arrived in 1967. Like much of the nation, Alexandria was engaged in some of the most important social and political issues of the 20th century. War, civil rights and issues of social and political enfranchisement were the topics of the day in the Alexandria Gazette newspaper. Whether directly involved or not, African Americans in Alexandria were in the midst of a national movement often referred to as the Black Power movement, in which the struggle for social equality and political advancement was coupled with the development of a uniquely black cultural style that aimed to represent the beauty and power of black identity. Assertively black, as opposed to assimilationist, imagery associated with the movement was freighted with a host of political implications. Personal style, hair, fashion, and music became a way of participating in the collective activism and social consciousness of Black Power. Day's astute representations of young people pay homage to the politically charged self-stylings of African Americans in the 1970s.

In the spirit of his early interest in local culture, many of Day's Alexandria paintings centered on neighborhood views. A traditional *plein-air* painter, Day took to the streets with his easel and paints to interpret and record the historic areas of Alexandria. Impressionistic views of Payne Street and Alfred Street capture the pulse of urban life in these formerly African American sections

of Alexandria. In the tradition of the French impressionists who influenced Day's artistry, he captures fleeting moments of urban life. He records both anonymous individuals going about their daily routine as well as the more fixed aspects of the neighborhoods including automobiles, telephone poles, trees, and storefront businesses – some of which are extant today. *King Street Discount II, Alexandria* features the crowded street outside the bustling King Street Discount store. The warm glow of the interior light of the shop provides an inviting ambiance as three locals gather just outside the door. The yellow, green and pink storefronts serve as a colorful backdrop to the street busy with pedestrians and cars.

It was while working outside on these urban views that Day encountered the young Alexandrians who would become the subjects of the remarkable series of portraits featured in *Style and Identity*. According to remembrances of the artist's son, H. Talmage Day, his father would strike up conversations with individuals passing by that were interested in his paintings. On occasion, Day would ask the individuals to model for him. As a result of these encounters, Day embarked on a series of portraits of Alexandrians, mostly young men, that provide a fascinating perspective on black culture, style and identity in the 1970s.

Day, an artist clearly mindful of the history of art, drew upon conventions of portraiture that date back to Renaissance Italy. The more than 40 existing portraits reflect these important and influential precedents. Typically, bust-length or half-length views of the sitters feature a threequarter face set against a nondescript background. The unobstructed focus on the sitter underscores the importance of individualized facial features, clothing, and status. This kind of representation was a method by which artists and individuals constructed personal and social identity in an increasingly secular society. Day's 20th -century approach to works such as Jack J.C. Chase (1974) and, indeed, the entire series of portraits of young Alexandrians draw upon this longstanding tradition in European portraiture. In fact, a reproduction of Spanish baroque painter Diego Velázquez's 1650 portrait of Juan de Pareja remained on Day's studio mantel at the time of his death. This painting depicting the artist's assistant, a young man of



Jet Set



James Veney



Anthony Lovelace



Williams



Russell Tutt

Moorish descent, is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and was undoubtedly a source for Day's series of portraits. The veracity and sensitivity with which Velázquez treats de Pareja's ethnic markers, his swarthy skin tone and bushy hair, are echoed throughout Horace Day's series of portraits of black Alexandrians.

Unlike his street scenes executed out of doors, Day produced the portraits in his studio at his Fairfax Street home in historic Old Town Alexandria. "I can speak best from my observations as a reluctant subject..." states son Tal Day. "My father would begin with a prepared canvas, gesso on canvas or board, a gestural drawing to frame the composition, a semi-transparent background color over the entire canvas, and would then build the composition from that point forward. The technique is one he learned from studying with Kenneth Hayes Miller at the Art Students League." According to conservator Jay Krueger, Day was so quick and comfortable with his medium and skill level that he was able to create the portraits directly from life with no evidence of preliminary sketches or drawings. A remarkable facility with wet oil paint enabled the artist to build the individualized portraits in one sitting with very little subsequent reworking of the paintings. The nature of this skillfully spontaneous creative encounter lends immediacy to the works and captures the spirit of the individuals.

Rather than seeking a universalizing approach to the models, Day was interested in their individual personas and sense of style. Works such as *Jet Set; Super Fly;* and *Upper King Street, Alexandria* are titled to forefront the trendy dress and lifestyle of contemporary urban black male culture. The full-length seated figure in *Super Fly* evokes the fashions featured in the infamous blacksploitation film of the same name that chronicled the underbelly of the urban drug culture. The sitter in *Jet Set* seems to wear the same type fedora hat as seen on the figure in *Super Fly*, suggesting the possibility that Day used the same model in both works. Nonetheless, both portraits highlight the

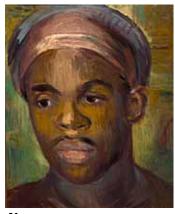
fashionable clothes and self-possessed attitude often associated with this contemporary urban "type."

"Black is beautiful," a mantra of the Black Power movement in the 1970s, was a rallying cry for black Americans to celebrate the characteristics of their blackness rather than strive to emulate the standards of beauty of white America, a sentiment that we know was shared by Day. Natural hair styles were seen as a symbol of both black individuality and power. Young, urban men and women challenged the status quo through personal style. Day's portraits of young Alexandrians such as James Veney, Anthony Lovelace, Dan Odie and Ricky McNeil feature young men with large "afro" hair styles. Popular during the time, the "afro" was a universal emblem of black contemporary fashion and signaled a sense of racial pride and cultural empowerment in those who wore them.

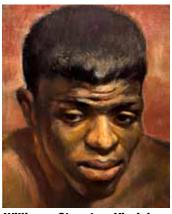
A striking feature of this body of portraits is their introspectiveness. None of the individuals present wide smiles or animated faces, perhaps as a counterpoint to the comic minstrel stereotypes that offended Day. His sitters are thoughtful, often moody. In *Williams - Staunton, Virginia*, Williams' furrowed brow and solemn visage produce a striking psychological portrait. *Russell Tutt* sits chin in hand in the traditional "thinker" pose – a traditional rhetorical gesture that has been used in portraiture to evoke intelligence and philosophical gravity. Once again, Day fuses the contemporary with the traditional conventions of portraiture.

Even though many of the portraits are named, a good number remain anonymous, shrouding the body of work with a sense of melancholy and mystery. Although many of the sitters are certainly still alive today, we know almost nothing of their lives. Yet through Day's series of portraits we can imagine the experiences and personal sensibilities of this captivating generation. Collectively, the rediscovered portraits by Horace Day bring to life the spirit and style of a slice of black Alexandria.

Adrienne L. Childs, Ph.D.



AI
Oil on Masonite
12" x 10"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Williams, Staunton, Virginia
Oil on Canvas
24" x 20"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Tony Wormley
Oil on Canvas Board
14" x 10"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Untitled
18" x 16.50"
Oil on Canvas
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



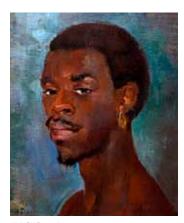
Young Woman
Oil on Canvas
24" x 20"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



James Veney
Oil on Canvas
12" x 10"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



J.C. in Blue Cap
(One of Two)
Oil on Canvas
17" x 15"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Phillips IOil on Canvas
16" x 14"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



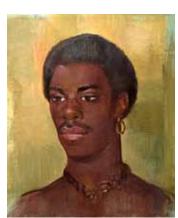
Untitled
Oil on Canvas
14" x 11"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Untitled
Oil on Canvas
14" x 11"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Super Fly, Upper King Street Alexandria, Virginia Oil on Canvas 18" x 14" Collection of H. Talmage and Barbara Day



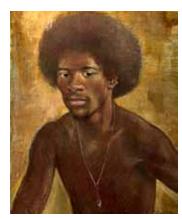
Phillips IIOil on Canvas
18" x 14"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Anthony Lovelace
Oil on Canvas
(ONE OF TWO)
18" x 14"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Reflections
Oil on Canvas
24" x 18"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Don Odie, Alexandria, VirginiaOil on Canvas
24" x 20"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Jet Set
Oil on Canvas
22" x 16"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Quinter Allen, Alexandria, VirginiaOil on Canvas:
24" x 18"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Tony Curtis, Staunton, Virginia
Oil on Canvas:
20" x 14"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Boy in Striped Tee ShirtOil on Canvas
16" x 14"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Jack ("J.C.") Chase, April 1974 - (One of Two) Oil on Canvas Board 24" x 18" Collection of H. Talmage and Barbara Day



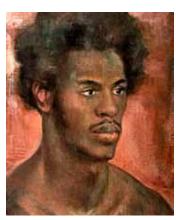
Walter Hollis, Alexandria, Virginia
Oil on Canvas
20" x 16"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Untitled
Oil on Canvas
24" x 20"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Russell Tutt, Alexandria, Virginia
Oil on Canvas
18" x 14"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Anthony Lovelace
Oil on Canvas:
(ONE OF TWO)
22" x 16"
Collection of H. Talmage and
Barbara Day



Young Woman, Staunton, Virginia Oil on Canvas 18" x 14.50" Collection of H. Talmage and **Barbara Day**



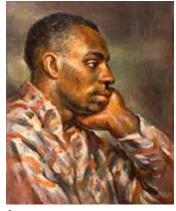
William Berry Oil Canvas 20" x 16" Collection of H. Talmage and **Barbara Day**



Ricky (One of Two) Oil on Canvas 24" x 18" Collection of H. Talmage and Barbara Day



Ricky McNeil, Alexandria, Virginia (One of Two) Oil on Canvas 20" x 16" Collection of H. Talmage and **Barbara Day**



Oil on Canvas 22" x 16" Collection of H. Talmage and **Barbara Day**



Payne Street Alexandria, Virginia Oil on Canvas 24" x 28" Collection of H. Talmage and **Barbara Day**



Alley Near Alfred Street II Alexandria, Virginia Oil on Canvas 24" x 30" Collection of H. Talmage and Barbara Day



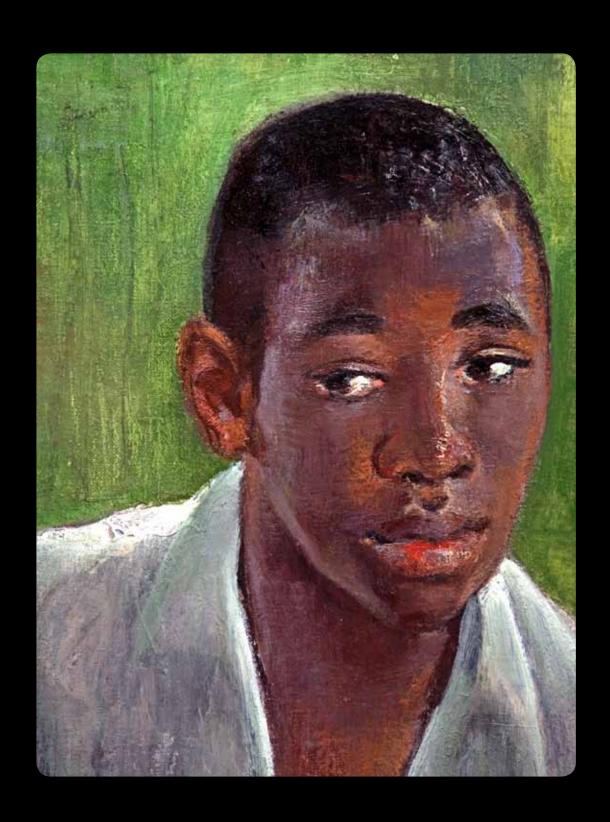
King Street Discount II Alexandria, Virginia Oil on Canvas 24" x 30" Collection of Charles R. Miller

Acknowledgments Style and Identity: Black Alexandria in the 1970s, Portraits by Horace Day

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